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ABSTRACT

The existing German curriculum should be updated to include career-oriented, career-related language courses, especially in German commercial language, since West Germany is one of the world's most important trading countries and the United States is a major trading partner. Language fluency alone is not sufficient for employment in international business. Language students must also have a command of technical business vocabulary and the tone and format of commercial correspondence, as well as an understanding of cultural traditions, social conventions, prejudices, and habits. Knowledge of the formality of German industrial culture and the conventions used in specific business-related situations is essential to conducting business competently and with the confidence of the German businessman. A detailed description of the elements of a German business letter is included as well as examples of various types of business correspondence, in German. (MSE)

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THE 3 C'S FOR COLLEGE GERMAN:

COMMUNICATION, CULTURE, AND COMMERCE

Kriemhilde I. R. Livingston

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THE 3 C'S FOR COLLEGE GERMAN:

COMMUNICATION, CULTURE, AND COMMERCE

INTRODUCTION

If the foreign language field is to progress toward new goals and our German language courses are to have relevance, the existing German curriculum needs to be restructured and up-dated to include career-oriented, career-related language courses (Brod, 1, p. 29). We need to develop in our students competence and career skills, both necessary tools that can help them increase their chances to penetrate the employment market and be successful. By bending and adapting to changes, we are diversifying our course offerings, the result of which will undoubtedly affect favorably both the language programs and the desired contacts with business and industry, thus strengthening our own program or curriculum by a much needed expansion and, at the same time, reward our students with a specialized and potentially marketable skill (Rentz, 10, p. 68).

Facts illustrate the need for German commercial language courses. West German machine tool exports ranked first in the world in 1978. Such exports in millions of dollars by country were as follows (Hart, 6, p. 29):

West Germany	$1,633
Japan	944
Switzerland	675
East Germany	655
Italy	576
USA	550

The Federal Republic of Germany is one of the most important trading nations in the world. In size of trade it is second only to the United States. In 1981, the combined value of U. S. imports and exports came to about $507 billion, compared to West Germany's $304 billion. Japan, with $295 billion, ranked third among major world traders.

Trade impacts directly and dramatically upon people's lives in the Federal Republic of Germany. One in every four jobs is dependent upon foreign trade; of every two automobiles produced in the country, one is for export. Put another way, German exports of goods (DM 396 billion) came to 25.6 percent of the Gross National Product in 1981 (DM 1,549 billion). In the United States and Japan, exports amounted to only 8 percent and 13.5 percent of the GNP, respectively.

The bulk of the Federal Republic's trade--about two-thirds--is with other Western industrial countries. Unsurprisingly, trade with the other members of the European Community amounts to half of all German foreign trade. Six of these E. C. countries--France, Holland, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and England--are among West Germany's top trading partners. Last year, the United States ranked third among suppliers and sixth among customers.

In 1981 German imports from the United States amounted to DM 28.3 billion, up 10.5 percent from 1980 (DM 25.7 billion).

Exports to the United States came to 25.9 billion, an increase of 20.9 percent over 1980 (DM 21.5 billion). Due to fluctuations in currency exchange rates, a different picture emerges when German trade figures are converted into U. S. dollars. Then the 10.5 percent increase in German imports from the U. S. turns into a 10.9 percent decline, and the 20.9 percent growth in exports to the U. S. becomes a drop of 2.7 percent (German Information Center, 3, pp. 1-2).

The entire German-speaking world includes not only the Federal Republic of Germany but also the German Democratic Republic, Austria, approximately two-thirds of Switzerland, South Tyrol, Liechtenstein, Alsace-Lorraine, Luxembourg, and historically the lost provinces in the East (Varner, 12, p. 62). The following table showing native speakers in millions indicates the importance of German as a language far beyond geographical borders (15, p. 195):

Chinese	916
English	403
Russian	277
Spanish	266
German	118
French	109

Considering the volume of world trade, German is, after English, the most important language in the world. When a company goes into international business, it is seeking a country that is populous and wealthy in order to have a large market. Germany is such a country. The size of Germany, only as large as

Oregon, can be misleading. The favorable business climate is also reflected in the comparison of per capita incomes in other countries (Varner, 12, p. 62):

Country	Population (in millions)	Per Capita Income
West Germany	62	$9,170
USA	214	8,400
France	50	6,800
Japan	113	5,100
United Kingdom	50	4,020
East Germany	17	3,730
India	450+	130

Recent economic trends clearly indicate that the study of German, including the teaching of commercial and business writing courses, should be encouraged. Students who are choosing a career in management positions in business should be afforded the opportunity for such study. If not implemented, the traditional and current curriculum could affect the quality and reputation of U. S. college foreign language training in the decades ahead.

CULTURAL FACTORS IN CORRESPONDENCE

According to Lambo (8, p. 193), communication, spoken or written, denotes an interaction between a sender and a receiver to expand the realm of ideas that they hold in common. Correspondence is one window into this culture. Bridges of human understanding have to be built (Opubor, 9, p. 147). The more communication there is between different countries, the

more we shall understand one another. However, "a certain level of mutual incomprehension may be a necessary price to pay for the maintenance of cultural pluralism, but cultural pluralism may be the only principle under which many nations (and ethnic groups) can preserve their sense of self-identity and self-respect" (7, p. 17). For example, "without Yankee ethos, can you expect a Yankee success?" (7, p. 18).

"Cultures, like individual human beings, have a certain right to privacy" (7, p. 20). We must remember that it is one thing to communicate with the people of another country and quite another to present our own form of life--and style--as if it were the only normal or natural one. What works in America does not always work in Germany. Culture and competence, culture and competitiveness, culture and value--all are expressed in commercial correspondence: thoroughness, punctuality, formality, firmness, politeness. The nature of the communicative repertoire of a society is a clear reflection of its central value system (Gross, 5, p. 30).

Germans and Americans are <u>not</u> alike. We are closely related, perhaps, but we are nevertheless the products of quite different cultural traditions, social conventions, economic conditions, historical experience, prejudices, and habits. The German convention--the result of a traditionally much more stratified society--calls for polite formality, which might appear to the

American of the so-called melting-pot convention as strange and unfriendly. Germany's formalities sometimes appear old-fashioned to the observer, but they only conceal--or adorn, if one likes--the reality of a typically modern, industrial mass society (Burmeister, 2, p. 9). One must be aware of the German historic background and tradition in order to understand it; centuries of tradition leave their mark even to this day.

The German business is more status-conscious than the American counterpart. Germans identify themselves more with their work than Americans do, from which the German derives a great deal of personal satisfaction, self-respect, and status in the community. Germans tend to develop a stronger loyalty to their company (Burmeister, 2, pp. 17-18).

In the United States it might be considered informal or "easy going" if the boss calls and addresses people by their first names. This is not the case in German business. A letter to the smallest businessman is addressed and the salutation is the same as one to the person heading the largest corporation. Actually, the old-fashioned class distinction (that the employer calls the employee or the "inferior" by his first name) went out of fashion in Germany more than two generations ago (Burmeister, 2, p. 21). Also, it is not uncommon to see two signatures under a letter. This means that the person writing the letter is authorized by his company to act only in conjunction

with another person. It could also mean that two different areas are involved, and, therefore, the matter must be decided and confirmed by the two people authorized to make decisions in these two areas (Burmeister, 2, p. 25). As one can see, the areas of competence are more sharply drawn in German business organizations than in those in the United States.

Mostly, letters are signed without having the full name and title typed below the signature. Signatures are also often preceded by abbreviations such as "ppa."; "i.V."; and "i.A." "ppa." means per procura, the Prokurist (holder of a procura), who has the authority to act for the principal in all business matters. "i.V." means in Vollmacht, which indicates that the person signing has the authority of an agent to act for his firm in his specific field. "i.A." means im Auftrag, by order of or on behalf of. The person signing the letter "by order of his superior" has not been conferred any power of representation. As Burmeister notes, the German system of business is organized in a different manner from that of U. S. companies (2, p. 26).

FORMAT OF CORRESPONDENCE

A letter takes the place of a conversation and is an ideal means of exchanging thoughts and information. It is a document of the human language, a most effective way of communication between people that not only can include remembrance, signs of affection, explanatory words that otherwise might be hard to

say but also the business-like sober statement of facts.

In German commercial correspondence, the outer form of the letter, the material, and the general appearance are all important. The outer form of the letter is the first impression received and is extremely important. The material of the paper, the envelope, the folding of the letter, the typing, and the general appearance give the letter its "face" (Wolter-Rosendorf, 14, pp. 7, 10). The letter should please the eye. It is important to know that German firms use stationery that is standardized by DIN-Norms according to format, layout, and printed items (DIN = Deutsche Industrie Norm). The normal letter has the format DIN A 4; it is 210mm x 297mm (Sachs, 11, p. 9). That means that it is longer than paper commonly used for business correspondence in the United States.

The "first law" in business correspondence is the Einteilung, the format per se, the Übersichtlichkeit, the clear, distinct, well-ordered arrangement. The various elements such as the letterhead (Briefkopf); inside address (Innenanschrift) of the receiver; date (Datum); subject (Betreff); salutation (Anrede); body of the letter (Brieftext); and the closing (Schlussformel); as well as the enclosure (Anlagevermerk) must be arranged to form a harmonious unit to create a brilliant total impression.

Detailed Breakdown of Elements

Letterhead (Briefkopf)

The letterhead states the name, and perhaps the address and telephone number of the firm. In addition, the line of business, the founding year, etc. may be stated.

Address of the Receiver (Anschrift des Empfängers)

For firms, the name and the postal address are stated. Should a letter addressed to a firm be designated for the attention of a certain individual, the abbreviation "z.H." (zu Händen) is used (Sachs, 11, pp. 9-10):

Müller & Co.	Firma	Eisengrosshandlung
z.H. Herrn Fritz Lang	Hans Bergmann	Hauser & Maurer

If addressed to an individual directly, the title of courtesy (Anrede) stands before the name, for example, Frau Ingrid Dilger, Fräulein Gisela Meyer, Herrn Walter Richter. Designations of profession and of office follow the title of courtesy such as Herrn, Frau, Fräulein, as in Herrn Direktor Hugo Zeiler. Academic titles are placed before and above the individual's name:

Herrn Rechtsanwalt Dr. Kurt Klug	Herrn Direktor Dr. jur. Franz Sattler
Herrn Medizinalrat Dr. Erich Herz	Herrn Dipl.-Ing. Stefan Siegler
Frau Studienrätin Liselotte Beck	Fräulein can. med. Doris Färber
Herrn stud. jur. Gerhard Schmitt	

Doktor is abbreviated only if the name follows.

The postal address states the name of the street and the house number; the four-digit zipcode is written to the left of the city. The addressee's postal district is written to the right of the city if it is a large city (the postal district is the delivery post office). The house number follows the name of the street.

Schillerstrasse 20
6200 Wiesbaden 4

Frauentorstrasse 234
8900 Augsburg 8

This newer style of writing the address has been adapted to international usage. It appears as follows (Burmeister, 2, p. 90):

Fräulein Annemarie Zimmermann
Hauptstrasse 67
8000 München 10

General rules regarding forms for street names are as follows: (1) Names of streets derived from nouns or adjectives are written as one word, for example, Gartenallee, Hauptstrasse, Goetheplatz, Mörikeweg, Bismarckstrasse, Kirchplatz. (2) Names that are formed from changed nouns or adjectives are declined and written separately with no hyphen, as in Augsburger Strasse, Lange Gasse, Hoher Ring, Kölner Promenade. (3) If a preposition is part of the street name, no hyphen is used, for example, Unter den Linden, Auf der Steige, Am Alten Graben. (4) Street names derived from first and last names or stating a title and name are written separately and with a hyphen:

Friedrich-von-Schiller-Platz; Konrad-Adenauer-Promenade; Bürgermeister-Ehrlich-Strasse; Sankt-Stephanus-Strasse (Sachs, 11, p. 10).

Reference Initials (Bezugszeichen)

Reference initials are established for identification purposes, which the receiver refers to when answering the correspondence. Unser Zeichen states the names or initials of the writer and the typist or secretary; perhaps the department is also indicated, e.g., Vers. H/N, which means that in Abteilung Versand, Herr Horn dictated the letter and Fräulein Neumann typed it. To the right of the reference initials is the sender's address, if it is not already contained in the letterhead, and the date.

The Date (Datum)

The German date always states the day, the month, and the year in that order, e.g., 24.7.1981 or 24. Juli 1981. Long names of months may be abbreviated: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Okt., Nov., Dez. (Sachs, 11, p. 11).

Subject (Betreff)

The word "Subject" (Betreff) is followed by a concise indication of the contents of the correspondence. This statement has to be underlined, but if it is more than one line, then only the last line is underlined.

The Salutation (Anrede)

The salutation is needed if one writes to an individual, for example, Sehr geehrter Herr Schulz, Sehr geehrte Frau Waldmann,

Sehr geehrtes Fräulein Weber (Sachs, 11, p. 12). The following format is used for firms in general without reference to a specific individual: Sehr geehrte Herren, Sehr geehrte Damen, Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren. At times, instead of the name of an individual even if the name is known to the writer, just the title can be used: Sehr geehrter Herr Direktor, Sehr geehrter Herr Professor, Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Haller (Sachs, 11, p. 12). If the name follows the title, the title is abbreviated (Wolter-Rosendorf, 13, p. 109). A comma may be used or an exclamation mark. If a comma follows the name, the body of the letter has to begin with a small letter. If the exclamation mark is used--a sign of greater formality--then the body of the letter begins with a capital letter. For example (Sachs, 11, p. 12):

Sehr geehrte Frau Direktor,	Sehr geehrter Herr Professor!
am 5. Juli habe ich . . .	Ich habe Ihren Brief . . .

The Body of the Letter (Brieftext)

With longer letters, paragraphs are important. Each new thought or statement deserves to be recognized by a paragraph; thus, the letter becomes clearly arranged or übersichtlich and impressive, the text easily remembered or einprägsam. As a result, it is easier for the receiver to find and remember important and interesting statements (Wolter-Rosendorf, 14, p. 10).

The Complimentary Close (Schlussformel)

The closing is affixed under the text of the letter at the right. Nowadays, Mit freundlichen Grüssen has replaced Hochachtungsvoll, which is seldom being used. In these instances, no comma is attached (Sachs, 11, p. 12). For an especially polite phrase, mostly to a person in high office and esteem such as an executive, director, etc., the closing is as follows (Wolter-Rosendorf, 14, pp. 27-28):

Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung

or:

Mit den besten Empfehlungen
Ihr sehr ergebener

Often the name of the firm is typed immediately under this phrase, below which the signature is written. The name of the undersigned is at times, but not very often, typed beneath it.

Enclosures (Anlagevermerk or Anlagen)

Any enclosures with the letter are indicated at the left bottom of the page. The word Anlage or Anlagen is underlined. Under this word, the enclosures are listed; at times only the number of enclosures is indicated, e.g., 3 Anlagen, but indication of such is compensated for by a diagonal stroke at the left of the line in the text where the enclosure is mentioned (Sachs, 11, p. 13).

Folding of the letter (Das Falten)

In folding a one-page letter for a square envelope, the written page is to be folded in half inwardly and placed into the envelope so that the edges of the folded letter face upward. This is done so that when a letter opener is used, the page does not get cut and the written message inside remains intact. With a long rectangular envelope, the letter is folded into three parts: the bottom third covers the middle third, and the top third is folded backward, showing the address of the receiver (Wolter-Rosendorf, 14, pp. 11-12).

The name of the sender should be written on the left upper corner of the envelope's front (Burmeister, 2, p. 90). The address of the receiver on the envelope is to appear exactly as it does in the letter. For foreign letters, the country of destination is written below the complete address and is underlined. The country is always written in the language of the sender (Sachs, 11, p. 11).

TONE OF CORRESPONDENCE

It is said that the German business letter is polite, to the point, formal, concise, very business-like, respectful, and perhaps even archaic. For example, the address of the receiver might read Herrn Dr. med. Alfred Geiger, Frau Prof. Dr. Helga Ackermann, or Herrn Prof. Dr. Reinhard Wagner. Similarly, the

salutation could be Sehr geehrter Herr, Sehr geehrter Herr Doktor, or Sehr geehrter Herr Professor. The closing, to a mayor, for instance, could be either

In aufrichtiger Verehrung
Ihr sehr ergebener
Hans Mayer

or

Mit dem Ausdruck vorzüglicher Hochactung
Ihr sehr ergebener
Max Schnell

Women whose age is beyond the middle twenties are addressed with Frau even though they are unmarried. Women academicians are always addressed with Frau (Wolter-Rosendorf, 13, p. 108): Frau Studienrätin Ulrike Jäger.

Frequently one sees an exclamation mark behind the salutation, but more and more it is being replaced by a comma. After all, we are addressing the person, not shouting at him. We also do not domineeringly challenge him to anything but simply communicate with him (Wolter-Rosendorf, 13, p. 109).

For most letters that are directed to an official place, such as the county court, but not to a certain individual (perhaps only Department IV, Room 321), no form of salutation or closing is needed, only the signature (Wolter-Rosendorf, 13, p. 110). Those letters addressed to firms in foreign countries, however, include the salutation Sehr geehrte Herren, Sehr geehrte Damen, or Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren, and a closing phrase is customary (Sachs, 11, p. 12).

The German in business correspondence avoids flowery language (eine Floskel), slang phraseology, or any kind of colloquialism. Also, the subjunctive is very often applied for politeness, requests, and suggestions, for example, Dürfte ich Sie bitten; Wären Sie bereit; Hätten Sie noch einen Wunsch, dann . . . ; Wenn Sie weiterhin unsere Zeitschrift empfangen möchten. . . . The letter is written as concisely and to the point as possible. It is composed in a formal, respectful, very business-like, yet very polite tone (Wolter-Rosendorf, 13, p. 110).

Exhibits A, B, and C provide examples of business letters showing acceptable variations in format and tone.

CONCLUSION

The Federal Bureau of Statistics has reported that exports to the United States have registered a dramatic increase. West German shipments to the U. S. leaped 49 percent in the first half of 1984, reaching DM 20.9 billion. This was double the amount recorded in all of 1980 (German Information Center, 4). This shows clearly the competitiveness of German industry. We, as foreign language teachers, should make the international business scene our business. We cannot ignore any longer the race with growth (das Wettlaufen mit dem Wachstum). Fluency in a foreign language itself is not a sufficient criterion for

employment in international business. Our language students must also acquire a fluent command of a technical business vocabulary--which includes a knowledge of the cultural factors, format, and tone of commercial correspondence--and the ability to understand and adjust to the ways of life typical of another culture.

EXHIBIT A

Trend Shop 8 München 2, Sendlinger Strasse 55

Mrs. Gisela Long
123 Sunshine Lane
Akron, Ohio 44305

Ihr Zeichen	Ihre Nachricht vom	Unsere Zeichen	Datum
	18.11.71	Be	25.11.71

Sehr geehrte Mrs. Long,

bezüglich Ihres obigen Schreibens teile ich Ihnen mit, dass ich in meinen Geschäften leider keine Dirndl führe. Beiliegend erhalten Sie Anschriften von führenden Münchner-Dirndl Geschäften.

Ich hoffe, Ihnen mit diesen Angaben gedient zu haben und zeichne

Mit freundlichen Grüssen

EXHIBIT B

FISCHER & CO.

BAYERNS GROSSES SPEZIALHAUS FÜR GEPFLEGTE DAMENBEKLEIDUNG, MÜNCHEN

8 München 2
Rosenstrasse 1 Ecke Marienplatz

Frau Annemarie Zimmer
Bäckergasse 566
6200 Wiesbaden 4

Ihr Zeichen	Ihre Nachricht	Unser Zeichen	Tag
		sm	18.11.1971

Sehr verehrte gnädige Frau!

Wir danken Ihnen für Ihr freundliches Schreiben vom 14.11., müssen Ihnen jedoch leider mitteilen, dass wir keinen Katalog herausgeben, da unsere Modelle sehr rasch wechseln.

Sollten Sie jedoch einmal nach München kommen, sind wir gerne bereit, Sie in unserem Hause unverbindlich zu beraten.

Wir verbleiben

mit bester Wertschätzung

F i s c h e r & Co.

ppa.

EXHIBIT C

Generallandesarchiv Kaltenhofen

Generallandesarchiv Kaltenhofen . Nördl. Hildapromenade 2 . 6500 Kaltenhofen 1

Herrn Gerhard Wagner
Eschenweg 10
8900 Augsburg

Kaltenhofen, den 5.11.1984

Fernsprecher: Ortskennzahl 08 36
Vermittlung Nr. 153-2
(Staatsfernsprechzentrale)
Durchwahl-Nr. 153-/1131
Aktenzeichen: A2-7980-84/Bre.
(Bitte bei Antwort angeben)

Betreff: Archivbenutzung; hier: Familienforschung

Bezug: Geldeingang am 5.11.1984

Anlagen: 4 Fotokopien
1 quitt. Rechnung

Sehr geehrter Herr Wagner,

angeschlossen übersenden wir Ihnen Fotokopien der Geburts- bzw. Heiratseinträge der von Ihnen gesuchten Personen aus den Standesbüchern von Achern. Wir verwahren die Standesbücher der ehemals badischen Gemeinden nur für den Zeitraum von 1810 bis 1869. Für genealogische Nachforschungen vor 1810 müssen die Kirchenbücher zu Rate gezogen werden, die sich überwiegend bei den Pfarrämtern befinden. Wir empfehlen Ihnen, sich für Ihre weiteren Forschungen an diese Institutionen zu wenden.

Mit freundlichen Grüssen

(Dr. Kurt Kraus)

Oberstaatsarchivrat

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